

*As we approach the tenth anniversary of the Church's disciplining of six Mormon intellectuals and heightened tension between official and unofficial Mormonism, two careful Church watchers, scholars, and friends reflect—and disagree—about “ecclesiastical abuse,” accountability, and how best to move toward understanding and forgiveness.*

## THE CHURCH AND ITS SCHOLARS: TEN YEARS AFTER

By Lavina Fielding Anderson

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This essay by Lavina Fielding Anderson and the one by Armand Mauss that follows were first presented 9 August 2002 at the Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium. With the authors' permission, both essays have received only minor stylistic and format editing, which includes leaving them in their voices from that day and time. Sunstone symposiums strive to reach the ideals of an “open forum” in which presenters engage in an honest and responsible interchange of ideas, and—even when they disagree on methodology, evidence, or approach—remain respectful of each other and the dialectical processes through which truths are ultimately proved.*

I AM HONORED TO BE HERE TODAY ON THE SAME program with Armand Mauss. Earlier this summer, we were congratulating ourselves on the fantastic serendipity of unwittingly teaming up in this session, which will be the forty-fifth presentation for each of us at a Sunstone symposium. We know this thanks to Martha Bradley's history of Sunstone symposiums (SUNSTONE, July 2002), but perhaps the real serendipity is that this is the forty-fifth time Sunstone has been willing to give both of us a place, an audience, and an invitation to share our ideas and perceptions on various topics.

As an excommunicated Mormon, I'm particularly grateful, because I realize that it could easily be otherwise. Since I am so very aware of the many places in which my voice is not welcome, the fact that Sunstone welcomes me places me everlastingly in debt, first to Elbert Peck, and now to Dan Wotherspoon, and their respective committees.

This session is, in fact, Dan's idea. When he asked if I were interested in doing a tenth-anniversary retrospective, I



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blinked. I knew I was behind on most projects, but surely I hadn't skipped a whole year? Didn't he mean 2003, ten years after the explosion of firings and excommunications? No, he meant ten years from the August 1992 Sunstone at which I had presented the chronology documenting what I saw as an increasingly unhealthy relationship between the Church and its intellectuals and feminists. Updated and expanded, the part dealing with scholars had been published in the spring 1993 issue of *Dialogue*, and the part dealing with feminists had been published in the December 1992 issue of the *Mormon Women's Forum Quarterly*.<sup>1</sup> It was the *Dialogue* article that the Strengthening Church Members Committee gave to my stake president in May 1993, leading to the first of a series of exchanges that resulted in his excommunicating me four months later.

But in the summer of 1992, that possibility seemed nothing short of ludicrous, even though the stories I had been collecting from survivors of ecclesiastical abuse were educating me that the unthinkable was a daily reality for a sobering number of people. I had given an early version of the chronology at the Washington, D.C., symposium, which is where I first met David Knowlton. David was then experiencing his own nightmare of accelerating constriction at BYU. He would be fired by the next spring.

Elbert later told me that he had waited to see what I would say in D.C. before he asked me to deliver the same paper in Salt Lake City. I asked him if he were sure he wanted me to. There was a long pause while he looked back at me, letting the question, “Was I sure?”, resonate between us. We both knew that the risks of saying some things at the Marriott, six blocks south of Temple Square, were considerably higher than saying them on the other side of the continent. Neither of us was sure. But we were sure enough.

At the Sunstone symposium on 6 August 1992, I had spoken in a plenary session in the central double room of the

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Marriott's conference center. The title on the program was: "Dialogue Toward Forgiveness: A Chronology of the Intellectual Community and Church Leadership." The published version didn't use the main title, "Dialogue Toward Forgiveness," but it was important in my presentation because it captured the tone I hoped to convey and the reason I was delivering the paper in the first place.

My introduction to that paper—and I think it's pretty amazing that I still subscribe to every word—said:

This presentation is a chronology of events that I consider significant in establishing the record of the frequently tense relationship during the past fifteen years or so between the institutional Church and two overlapping subcommunities: intellectuals and women. I believe there is no question that the institutional Church sees these two constituencies as troublesome, but I would characterize members of both as "friendly critics." They occupy a sometimes uneasy middle ground between the unfriendly critics of Mormonism on the one hand and the "uncritical friendlies" within the Church on the other who proclaim, "My Church, right or wrong, but it's never wrong."

Differences between scholars, feminists, and ecclesiastical leaders have been negotiated in various ways—sometimes mutually respectful, sometimes harsh and punitive. This is a chronology, not yet an analysis. One reason is that the sheer facts of "what happened" need to be determined before a responsible analysis can be made. For another reason, I approach this topic as a woman interested in relationships. I am less interested in the various positions defended and attacked about, say, the New Mormon History, than I am about what such attacks and defenses do to our community and the human costs in pain, mistrust, and violations of agency. The relationship between Mormon intellectuals and feminists and their Church is troubled and painful, and I hope to see steps taken toward reconciliation. So why am I committing such a potentially disruptive act?

I am doing it because I feel I must. [After the Council of the First Presidency and Twelve statement opposing symposia] I spent the fall and winter making this decision. I carefully reread the Book of Mormon, paying particular attention to passages about pride, rebelliousness, and disobedience. I also pondered my patriarchal blessing, which four times enjoins me to humility. I prayed, fasted, went to the temple, performed my callings with new exactness, and was newly attentive in meetings. I was looking for reasons not to write this paper. Earlier, I had prayed to know my responsibility in the Vietnam War, about priesthood for blacks, about the IWY [International Women's Year] conference, and the Equal Rights Amendment. In each case, I had received a clear an-

swer: "This is not your cause." This winter, on this issue, I received a different answer. I say this, not to play spiritual giant games, but to tell you I am trying to be as responsible as I know how to be.

I stand before you as a witness in the household of faith. I am not an accuser. I am not a judge. I know that the record is incomplete. I know there are parts I do not understand. I know many of the victims of ecclesiastical harassment have not been totally innocent of provocative actions. Furthermore, I know my record is lopsided. Since I have gathered these reports from the members, not from the ecclesiastical leaders, they inevitably reflect the perspectives of the members, nor am I free from personal sympathy in my reporting of them. There is no way, at this stage, to make allowances for the fact that a bishop or a General Authority would probably tell his version of the story a different way, that the member's shock and hurt inevitably overlay memories of the experience, or that the member may minimize in retelling or may still genuinely be unaware of, the extent to which his or her behavior may have been interpreted or misinterpreted as provocative, defiant, and defiant. I do not speculate on the motives of members involved in the cases reported here; some of these motives may have been unworthy. But I do not speculate on the motives of their ecclesiastical leaders either, and some of those motives may also have been unworthy.

Despite the lopsidedness, I insist that such a record is worth creating and maintaining. It is driven by the search for knowledge. We must not deny that such things exist nor that they are wrong. Once we know what happened, then we can begin to understand it. With understanding comes forgiveness. And with forgiveness, then love can increase in our community. I want a more loving community, a more inclusive community, a more forgiving community.

For example, the disclosure that Elder Paul Dunn had fabricated some of his military and baseball stories and his explanation that they were just parables made me physically nauseated. I felt personally betrayed and exploited. But when I read Elder Dunn's apology in the *Church News* soon after the full, helpful, and balanced discussion of the issue in *SUNSTONE*, I forgave him with all my heart, willingly and fully. Thanks to both *SUNSTONE* and Elder Dunn, I feel that a breach in the community has been healed. Certainly one in my heart has been. I offer this paper as another step in the ongoing dialogue within our community, with the hope of forgiveness, with the offer of forgiveness.<sup>2</sup>

Then the chronology followed. When I was through and sat down, I was so emotionally exhausted it took me a few seconds to catch up with myself. Irene Bates was sitting on the

front row. She jumped to her feet, applauding vigorously, and the rest of the audience followed. Eugene England was the first person to the rostrum during the question-answer period, and he added a piece to the chronology with a stirring *j'accuse* in the tradition of Emile Zola by denouncing the activities of a group I'd never heard of—the Strengthening Church Members Committee. Vern Anderson, then bureau chief for the Associated Press, who was sitting halfway back on the far right side, quietly stood up and walked out of the hall. At the end of the hour, Leonard Arrington rushed forward, and before I could come down the steps to meet him, seized my hand and kissed it. Obviously the chronology had touched a community nerve. On the news wire the next morning was the Church's confirmation that the Strengthening Church Members Committee did exist to document the troublesome activities of members.

However, as measured by desired results, this paper was spectacularly *unsuccessful*. Cecilia Konchar Farr and David Knowlton were fired from BYU the next spring, followed by the forced withdrawal of Brian Evenson. Gail Houston and Steve Epperson were also fired. Gail is teaching in New Mexico. Steve is an ordained Unitarian minister. Eugene England, Sam Rushforth, Scott Abbott, and Tim Slover all moved from BYU down the street to Utah Valley State College.

In addition to the disfellowshipping of Lynne Kanavel Whitesides, the following individuals from the Mormon intellectual community have also been excommunicated: Avraham Gileadi (who has since been reinstated), me, Maxine Hanks, Paul Toscano, D. Michael Quinn, David Wright (who had been earlier fired from BYU and was then teaching at Brandeis), Brent Metcalfe, Michael Barrett, and Steve Epperson. Janice Allred was excommunicated in time for Mother's Day 1995. Margaret Toscano was excommunicated for Thanksgiving 2000. Elbert Peck, twice scheduled for excommunication, was spared by as-yet-undisclosed administrative processes; but not, I believe, because those administrators believed him to be innocent. (See story, page 24.)

And since 1992, the level of authoritarianism in the Church has increased dramatically. I don't even know how to measure it. But here are some markers.

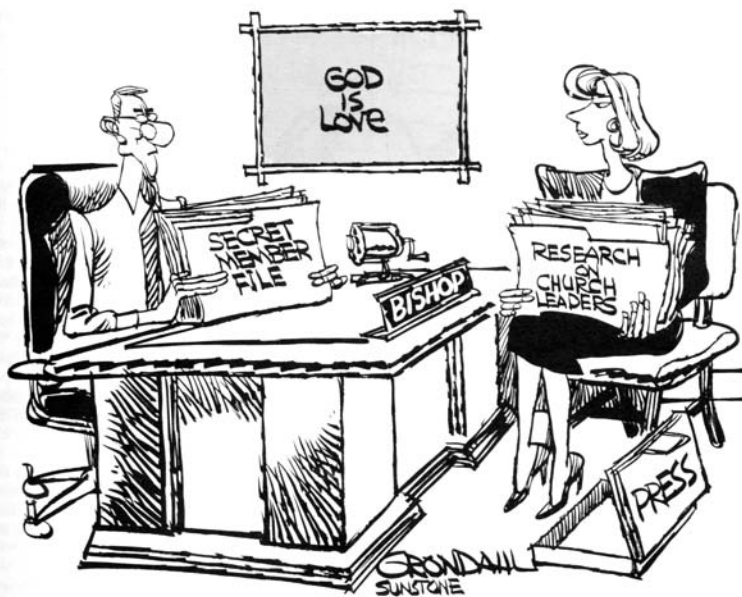
- In 1992, the Relief Society still had lessons of its own. They were written by anonymous committees, true, and they quoted General Authorities

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with ritualistic fervor, but sometimes they also quoted women and told stories about women. Now, the Relief Society manual is the same as the Melchizedek priesthood's. The only voice women hear in lessons is male, that of a Church president. This leads to truly bizarre episodes in which the woman teacher can read a passage addressed to "You brethren" to a roomful of sisters, and no one raises an eyebrow.

The visiting teaching messages, one page in the *Ensign*, were then focused on a theme the Relief Society presidency had picked for the year and always included an inspirational anecdote about a woman in addition to instructions and appropriate scriptures. Now, the visiting teaching message consists exclusively of quotations from the scriptures and General Authorities (very rarely there's a quotation from the Relief Society general president). The current First Presidency is always quoted.

- In 1992, the *Ensign* and the *New Era* published a First Presidency's message as the lead article every month. The *Friend* did a monthly interview with a General Authority, including the Seventies, focused on the experiences of their childhood. The *Ensign* also published a conference issue twice a year. In 2002, a new format was imposed on the magazines which greatly increased the amount of space given to General Authority pronouncements. Of fourteen articles or features in the June 2002 *Friend*, for example, five were by or about General Authorities. Sidebar quotations by General Authorities or general auxiliary leaders accompanied two more. For the June 2002 *New Era*, six of thirteen articles were by or about General Authorities with three quotation sidebars. Of fourteen articles (excluding regular departments such as "I Have a Question"), the July 2002 issue of the *Ensign* had five by General Authorities, four on the Nauvoo Temple, and three quotation sidebars. In short, there are fewer voices in official discourse, and they are increasingly male and increasingly authoritative.



CAL GRONDAHL, originally published SUNSTONE, Aug. 1992

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•The “follow the prophet” drumroll has today increased to a deafening decibel level. The apostles have been newly exalted as “prophets, seers, and revelators.” Obedience to the prophet is increasingly being conflated with obedience to God. Junior apostles and Seventies have even hinted that obedience is even more valuable when it seems to make no sense and when the person being obeyed has no particular expertise in the subject upon which he is requiring obedience.<sup>3</sup> A new piece of theology was articulated by Apostle David B. Haight when he redefined the law of common consent: “When we sustain the President of the Church by our uplifted hand, it not only signifies that we acknowledge before God that he is the rightful possessor of all the priesthood keys; it means that we covenant with God that we will abide by the direction and the counsel that come through His prophet.”<sup>4</sup>

• The Proclamation on the Family has likewise added a new piece of theology without benefit of canonization or discussion in its assertion that “gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose” (para. 2). This doctrinal claim provides a piece missing from the scriptures to support the Church’s wobbly position that homosexuality is always chosen and without a significant genetic component. The Church has paid millions of dollars, both directly from its own funds and indirectly through mobilizing member contributions, to political campaigns designed to pass legislation outlawing same-sex marriages that are already not legal.<sup>5</sup>

• The Church’s well-documented tendency to deny, minimize, or suppress information about inappropriate ecclesiastical response to reported cases of child sexual abuse, while undeniably successful in a significant fraction of the cases, has resulted in payments of millions of dollars in damages as victims have successfully sued in Texas, Oregon, California, and West Virginia. So far the Church has not lost a suit in Utah. The Church’s response is still shockingly inadequate. There are still no lessons even on inappropriate touching, let alone on emotional, physical, and spiritual abuse, in the child, youth, and women’s curricula. There is still no help line for victims, only a hotline for ecclesiastical leaders. I’ve heard from correspondents across the country that the ritualistically invoked “training” the Church claims to give ward and stake leaders is, for the most part, confined to a single annual session for priesthood leaders. In our stake, the last session of which I am aware was given three years ago and focused, not on helping victims, but on safeguarding the legal rights of the accused abuser. In our ward on 11 August 2002, the high council speaker assigned to speak on abuse commented that the official hotline had logged 20,000 calls in 2001.<sup>6</sup>

• Not the least of the bitter harvest of the last decade is what has happened to many children of “the purge”—youngsters who have seen the Church at its cruelest. By my count, the excommunicants I have listed have forty-one children among them. I don’t have information on Gileadi’s children, but twenty-five of the remaining thirty-two—78 percent—no longer affiliate with the Church. To my knowledge, only two of

the young men growing up in these families have served missions since 1993. Church leaders, for all their pro-family rhetoric, seem to be frighteningly willing to consider this generation of children as collateral damage.

I feel immense gratitude that our son, Christian, who has seen the Church at its worst, still was able to look past some of this behavior and has chosen to live a life of allegiance. As he announced in his own Sunstone presentation at age seventeen, he planned to serve a mission, which he has done, and to marry in the temple, which he will do next month.<sup>7</sup> I feel immense sorrow for those other children who have gone into exile with their parents, who must necessarily see the Church as endangering, rather than enhancing, their spiritual lives. I deeply resent the injustice that, rather than assuming its share of the responsibility for this situation, Church leaders simply blame the parents.

A FRIEND OF mine used to say, “Progress is when things are getting worse more slowly.” I don’t know if, by that definition, what we are experiencing is progress or not. I hope so. I asked Armand to be my respondent for this paper (to which symposium organizers eagerly agreed) because I’m counting on him to add some balance; but from my perspective, it’s not unrealistic to interpret the last ten years as a litany of losses—losses to individuals and losses to the community.

One of those losses has been the clarifying and strengthening voice of Eugene England. Gene deeply regretted his denunciation of the Strengthening Church Members Committee. He apologized in a letter to SUNSTONE, in person to the two apostles, Elders James E. Faust and Dallin H. Oaks, who were then serving on the committee, and also in his Provo residential ward Sunday School class in October 1992. Writer Scott Parkin, who attended his first Sunstone just last year and admits that he quite enjoyed it, even though he’s on what he calls “the conservative end,” was then a member of the Englands’ ward. With his permission, I quote his account of that occasion:

I happened to live in Gene’s ward at the time. I had no idea of what had happened at Sunstone and so had no idea what the context was when he stood up during Gospel Doctrine class and with a broken heart and contrite spirit apologized for any harm he had done in speaking his opinions. He reiterated his faith and trust in the Brethren and his commitment to the Church and the gospel. Though I had no idea why he had spoken those words, I felt that he spoke them from his heart and with extraordinary humility. I believed him, and I believe the Spirit bore witness of the truth of his words and his intent. That day I gained a deep and abiding respect for Gene England as an honest seeker for truth—a respect that causes me to now read his words with a great deal more charity than I once might have.

Scott adds that this experience is one reason he is so grateful

Gene recorded his own story of this experience and why Scott is such a strong believer that “we all need to tell our stories our way, because only by telling the story from all perspectives and viewpoints can we understand the impact and power of human experience—to our benefit and detriment.”<sup>8</sup>

I yield to none in my admiration of Gene’s extraordinary spiritual sensitivity and willingness to look first in his own heart instead of accusing others; but I parted company with him on the conclusion he drew—that because two apostles were involved, it was inappropriate to critique the action. Gene and I had several conversations on the topic. He failed to persuade me that behavior that would have been reprehensible if William O. Nelson (executive secretary of the committee) had been doing it as a freelance orthodoxy vigilante somehow became *not* reprehensible if two apostles were doing it. I failed to persuade him of my position. That isn’t very important. What is important is that we were having a dialogue and that forgiveness, if any was needed between us because of our differences on this issue, was woven into the very fiber of our discourse.

I can’t help wondering what might have happened if his treatment at BYU and before had been such that he did not spend a crucial year thinking it quite natural that he was depressed. I can’t help wondering if, in fact, earlier diagnosis might have made it possible for him to still be with us.

In August 1992, I ended my presentation with seven proposals. It’s not only amazing that I still subscribe fully to these seven proposals, but it’s terrifying that they are still so utterly relevant. I said:

FIRST, WE MUST SPEAK UP. We must stop keeping “bad” secrets for an abusive church. We must share our stories and our pain. When we feel isolated, judged, and rejected, it is very easy to give up, to allow ourselves to become marginalized, and to accept the devaluation as accurate. If we silence ourselves or allow others to silence us, we will deny the validity of our experience, undermine the foundations of authenticity in our personal spirituality, and impoverish our collective life as a faith community. During the 1970s and 1980s, I was an observer and occasionally a coworker as a handful of modern women scholars discovered Mormon women’s history. They did it from documents. No living tradition had survived of the spiritual gifts and powers of women, of how they saw themselves, of their vi-

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sion for women of the Church and the world. By failing to perpetuate the past as a living tradition, the women and men who should have been its guardians had erased it. I cannot tell you how this hurt me. I learned for myself that silence and self-censorship are terrible wrongs. Reducing the diversity of voices in a community to a single, official voice erases us. We must join in the on-going dialogue between individual and community, out of necessity and also out of love.

SECOND, WE MUST LABEL WHAT HAPPENS AS ACCURATELY AS WE CAN.<sup>9</sup> I pay my Church the compliment of thinking it espouses the ideals of justice and fairness. I am confused when leaders confiscate temple recommends of members who publicly praise the Church’s actions. (In 1991, you’ll remember, Ross Petersen, Keith Norman, Elbert Peck, and Daniel Rector, all had their temple recommends taken away for newspaper interviews in which they commended the 1991 changes in the temple ceremony as helpful and progressive.) Blacklists, secret files, and intimidation violate my American sense of fair play and my legal expectation of due process. They violate the academic ideal that truth is best served by an open interchange, that disagreement can be both courteous and clarifying, and that differences are not automatically dangerous. Most important, I am dismayed when the organization that teaches me to honor the truth and to act with integrity seems to violate those very principles in its behavior. I am bewildered and



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grieved when my church talks honorably from one script and acts ignobly from another. Some of the incidents I have mentioned have made me cry out with James: “My brethren, these things ought not so to be” (James 3:10). I say they are wrong. I say they must change.

THIRD, WE MUST DEFEND EACH OTHER. . . . Although some intellectuals and feminists are bitter, those I know personally are not trying to undermine the faith of others, do not hate the Church, and are not cynical about their personal faith. To the extent there is anti-intellectualism and anti-feminism in the Church’s response, it is unfair. Also unfair are any malice and irresponsibility in the activities of intellectuals and feminists. We need to provide honest feedback to each other, express caring and concern for each other. If I’m saying excessive, irresponsible things, I need to know it; and I’ll hear it most clearly from my friends. We must sustain and support individuals who are experiencing ecclesiastical harassment. Such support will help prevent overreactions and speed the healing process in the survivor. Supportive observers may also help prevent some ecclesiastical abuse.

FOURTH, WE MUST PROTEST, EXPOSE, AND WORK AGAINST AN INTERNAL ESPIONAGE SYSTEM THAT CREATES AND MAINTAINS SECRET FILES ON MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH. If there were some attempt to maintain a full and complete record—including the record of Church service, the lives influenced for good, and the individual’s spiritual strength—I might feel differently. I might also feel differently if individuals had access to their files. But they are secretly maintained and seem to be exclusively accusatory in their content. I find such an activity unworthy in every way of the Church of Jesus Christ.

FIFTH, WE MUST BE MORE PROACTIVE IN DEALING WITH OUR LEADERS, BASED ON OUR PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEM. I have had good experiences with the stake president who called me in over the news stories about the temple ceremony changes [he was released within a few months, and his successor excommunicated me]; but I am repelled by reports of puppet interviews, where a stake president or bishop is ordered to interview and/or punish a member on information secretly supplied by ecclesiastical superiors. Such a procedure does not uphold the ideal of confidentiality; rather it violates the trust that should exist between member and leader, and we should say so. Furthermore, the stake president, not the offended General Authority, is required to deal with the offender. This process short-circuits the scriptural injunction of face-to-face confrontation, including “rebuking betimes with sharpness” and then “showing forth afterwards an increase of love.” And finally, such a system isolates and insulates leaders from members. These leaders create hostile stereotypes of members who are “evil” and “deserve” to be punished and



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excluded. Similarly, members judge and stereotype faceless and voiceless General Authorities who are known to them only through punitive intermediaries. Both behaviors are equally damaging.

SIXTH, WE NEED TO SUPPORT, ENCOURAGE, AND SUSTAIN ECCLESIASTICAL LEADERS WHO ALSO VALUE HONESTY, INTEGRITY, AND NURTURING. Michael Quinn’s stake president is one example. In March 1992, David Knowlton moved a large audience at Sunstone in Washington, D.C., by describing, how, after repeated abrasive encounters with his stake president, his bishop listened, asked him how he felt, and gave him a blessing. David said that he could not stop weeping during this interview, which did much to heal his wounds. When Garth Jones in Anchorage, Alaska, used a Bible translation other than the King James Version in his Sunday School class, a visiting high councilor informed the stake president, who instructed the bishop to release Garth. The bishop said he would fast and pray as he considered the stake president’s “advice.” After doing so, he reported he felt his initial inspiration in calling Garth to that position was still valid and declined to release him. “This bishop is not a liberal man,” observed Garth. “He’s a righteous man.” We need more such models of nurturing leaders.

AND SEVENTH, AS A COMMUNITY, WE MUST SEEK HUMILITY AS A PREREQUISITE FOR A MORE LOVING, A LESS FEARFUL, COMMUNITY. The apostle Paul queried, “Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?” (Galatians 4:16) Oliver Cromwell pleaded: “I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken.”<sup>10</sup> These are questions we must ask ourselves, as well as posing them for others. My prayers for the Church’s ecclesiastical officers have never been more sincere than during the past few months, even when my sorrow and anguish have been most intense.

I consider myself to be simultaneously a loyal Latter-day Saint, an intellectual, and a feminist. [I am also a supporter of equal ecclesiastical rights for gays and lesbians.] My identity involves all [four] elements. I cannot truncate my life by excising one or more elements in a misguided search for simplicity. . . . Cathy Stokes changed my life forever by telling me, "When I went to the temple, I consecrated all of me. That included my blackness. If the Lord can use it, it's his." She set me on the road to realizing that the Lord wanted all of me, even the parts that the Church did not want and could not use. With the utmost reverence, I declare that I have tried to make a full consecration.

Consequently, as I hope for forgiveness, so must I offer it. And I do. We must mutually acknowledge our pain, whether intentionally or unintentionally inflicted. We must ask for and offer forgiveness. We must affirm the goals of charity, integrity, loyalty, and honesty that are foundational in the gospel. And someday, may we move beyond forgiveness of the humanness in our revealed religion to celebrate being a community knit together in joy and love.<sup>11</sup> ☞

## NOTES

1. Lavina Fielding Anderson, "The LDS Intellectual Community and Church Leadership: A Contemporary Chronology," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 26, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 7–64; "Landmarks for LDS Women: A Contemporary

Chronology," *Mormon Women's Forum Quarterly*, vol. 3, nos. 3 & 4 (December 1992).

2. Quotation is from the delivery text of the paper. Most, but not all, of the information is the same as in the published version in *Dialogue*. See "The LDS Intellectual Community," 8–9.

3. See, for instance, Henry B. Eyring, "Finding Safety in Counsel," *Ensign* (May 1997); R. Conrad Schultz, "Faith Obedience," *Ensign* (May 2002).

4. David B. Haight, "Solemn Assemblies," *Ensign* (Nov. 1994).

5. See, for instance, "Proposition 22, California, and the Mormon Church: A Chronology," in *Case Reports of the Mormon Alliance*, Vol. 5, eds. Lavina Fielding Anderson and Janice Merrill Allred (Salt Lake City: Mormon Alliance); "Church Funds Initiative to Ban Same-Sex Marriages in Alaska," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 5 Oct. 1998, A4; "A Mormon Crusade in Hawaii: Church Aims to End Gay Union," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 9 June 1996, B1.

6. Notes in my possession.

7. Christian Anderson, "Autumn Storm: An Excommunicant's Son Reflects," *SUNSTONE* (Sept. 1998): 12–13. Christian did marry Marina Capella, 7 Sept. 2002, San Diego Temple. Christian and Marina are both biology majors about to enter their senior year at Stanford University.

8. Scott Parkin, "Re: [AML] Sanitized LDS History?," 19 Apr. 2002; Scott Parkin, email to Lavina Fielding Anderson, 24 Apr. 2002.

9. In the published version, this sentence became the more specific, "Second, we must protest injustice, unrighteousness, and wrong." ("The LDS Intellectual Community," 61.)

10. As quoted C. Robert Mesle, *Fire In My Bones: A Study in Faith and Belief* (Independence, Missouri: Herald House, 1984), 204.

11. In the published version, this last sentence became "Such forgiveness, such acceptance hold the promise of movement toward a Christlike community" (64). The other changes between the delivery text and the published version are inconsequential editing changes. (See *ibid.*, 61–64.)



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# SEEING THE CHURCH AS A HUMAN INSTITUTION

By Armand L. Mauss

I AM BOTH TOUCHED AND FLATTERED BY LAVINA'S invitation to respond to her heartfelt concerns about the Church and its scholars. Lavina is among the people whom I most love and respect on the earth, but she knows I do not find her chronology of ecclesiastical horror stories to be entirely fair or balanced. Her twenty-year chronology, published in 1993, was as much an essay in investigative reporting as a scholarly assessment. While it does record a few neutral and mundane developments, it is largely a selective record of unhappy encounters between her friends and certain Church leaders, general and local. At the outset, she defines her chronology for us as accounts of "survivors of ecclesiastical abuse," lest we are tempted to entertain other interpretations for some of these encounters. Many of the encounters themselves are selectively detailed, if only because Lavina was not able to get enough relevant facts from the key parties involved. While conceding that some of these accounts might therefore be "lopsided," she feels justified in writing about them anyway, just because there is "no way, at this stage, to make allowances" for the varied versions that different key parties might have of these encounters. Of course, one way might have been to wait for a later "stage" with more information. Indeed, it happened that in one of the cases to which her chronology gave some prominence, I was personally acquainted with a number of facts that would have shed quite a different light on the case. I could not help wondering how many other cases suffered from selective presentation. It seemed a little like bringing home a sack of sour lemons from the citrus section of the grocery store without having noticed any sweet oranges in the bins.

Not that there would be any difficulty in finding sour lemons. I have lived long enough to have tasted a great many lemons in the Church myself and perhaps have even served some. Had I kept track, I could perhaps match Lavina's account, lemon for lemon. But why should we be surprised at all the lemons? The Lord himself is quoted as warning that almost all of us tend to "exercise unrighteous dominion." This could be as true of some feminists and intellectuals among us as of

some of our leaders. Yet I have never found the public and strident outrage over this tendency to be very constructive or even to promote healing. It seems to me somewhat comparable to sharing family scandals in public. Of course, if a crime has been committed, the perpetrator should be exposed to the authorities fully and quickly, family member or not, but family problems will not necessarily be solved by airing them in public, and certainly those responsible cannot be expected to respond positively to public embarrassment. Thus, when my friends have felt mistreated in the Church, I have preferred to offer private counsel, and such comfort as I can, rather than join in public recriminations, especially where I have lacked specific information.

It is not my place to tell Lavina or anyone else how to respond to their treatment in the Church, but my preference is to step back from the "trees" of my own feelings and experiences and try for a more detached view of "the forest." From such a perspective, I have elsewhere analyzed and attempted to explain the more general historical context, namely the transformation in LDS culture and governance during the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Much of that transformation has been as disquieting to me as to Lavina. However, rather than give vent to anger in public denunciations of Church policies or leaders, I have found it helpful to keep in mind certain basic ways of understanding the Church as an institution, and I would like to share a few of these with you in case they might offer some useful perspective.

FIRST, I TRY TO KEEP IN MIND THAT THE CHURCH MAKES NO CLAIM TO BEING A DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTION. In the quaint imagery of our nineteenth-century discourse, it is often called a "kingdom." As I read history, early Utah was, indeed, much more like a kingdom than it is now, and I suspect that those chafing in today's Church under centralized control, male domination, and internal espionage might benefit by a comparative perspective. Yet, even an attenuated kingdom is not a democracy, so I have never been surprised, as Lavina apparently has, by "violat(ions) of my American sense of fair play and . . . expectation of due process," to say nothing of "academic ideal(s)." When I hear injunctions such as "follow the prophet," or "when the leaders have spoken, the thinking has been done," I am sometimes irritated by the imperious style and rhetoric, but the substance is not very different from what



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corporate management might say when they call on their staff to “get with the program.” Corporations can be run as democratic cooperatives, but most are not. Some Protestant churches are more or less democratic, but not all. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is not a democracy, so why should anyone expect it to operate as though it were? It is, however, a fully voluntary organization, and if the time ever comes when I feel that it has lost its divine mandate, or that its policies and teachings do more harm than good, I will simply walk quietly away. I do not discount any of the harm Lavina has reviewed, in either this or earlier presentations, but I am not so sure that all the blame lies with Church leaders, and I still find far more good than harm in LDS church life.

SECOND, I HAVE LEARNED THAT SOCIAL GROUPS, ESPECIALLY LARGE, BUREAUCRATIC ORGANIZATIONS, WHETHER KINGDOMS OR DEMOCRACIES, OPERATE BY SUPRAINDIVIDUAL PROCESSES AND IMPERATIVES. At the individual level, members and leaders might do the best they can with the information and perspectives available to them. Many individual bureaucrats even have altruistic intentions, but as often as not, they are guided by self-interest, so well expressed in the dictum CYOB (“cover your own behind”). Organizational processes can rarely be controlled fully by individual leaders or bureaucrats, whatever their intentions. One of the processes beyond individual control is sometimes called “the law of unintended consequences.” These unintended consequences, when viewed from a later perspective, might appear tragic. For example, I do not think Joseph Smith, when he instituted the practice of plural marriage in Nauvoo, realized that he was setting in motion forces that would lead directly to his own assassination and the subsequent chaos. On the other hand, as a more salutary example, he probably did not anticipate that the first missionary expedition sent to the Lamanites would accomplish so little among the Indians but would instead double the fledgling organization’s membership by the conversion of Sidney Rigdon and his Kirtland congregation.

There are many more twentieth-century examples, but space permits mention of only one: When the so-called “correlation program” was seriously implemented in the 1960s, it seems unlikely to me that one of the calculated intentions was a crackdown on women and blacks. Yet the Relief Society, Primary, and other auxiliaries lost the autonomy that they had



JONATHAN COOMBS

once enjoyed; and without the priesthood, the few black Boy Scouts in the Church were automatically ineligible for troop leadership positions. Conspiracy theorists might see a pernicious motivation of sexism and racism behind all this. I find it simpler, and probably more realistic, to see these developments as unintended consequences, which Church leaders have attempted to mitigate somewhat without reversing the “correlation” program itself. We know that “the Lord moves in mysterious ways,” and never more so than when He works through bureaucracies. We often have to take a very long view to see the divine hand, and I can understand why some are not willing to wait.

When orthodox Latter-day Saints bear testimony that the Church is led by prophets, they rarely give any thought to the mixture of the human and the divine that underlie these organizational processes. It has been a long time since any LDS prophet has claimed to enjoy direct revelation through personal conversations with the Lord. Unless we are naive enough to think that our prophets obtain revelation primarily through such personal conversations, we must fall back on what the scriptures say about the revelatory process in passages like D&C 9 and Moroni 10:4–5. Those passages convince me that revelation begins with human initiative and that divine confirmation is always problematic, because it has to break through a variety of cultural and psychological preconceptions.

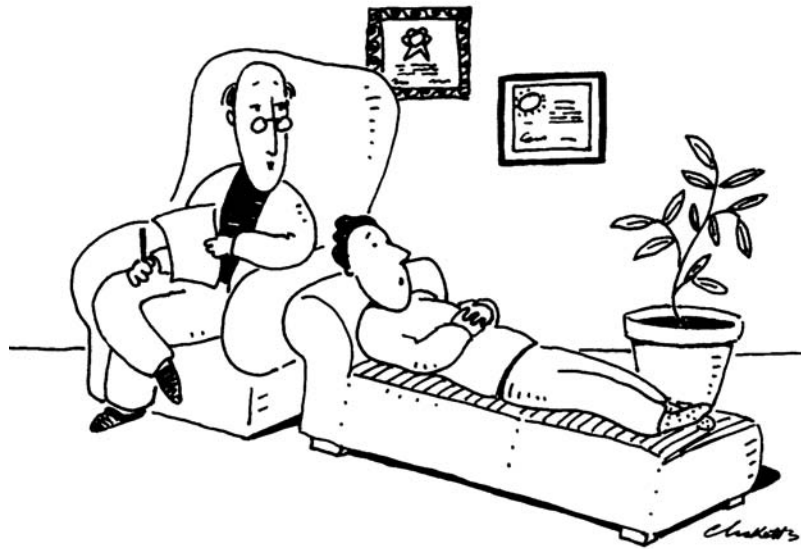
My study of LDS history convinces me that although the

## THE CHURCH AND SCHOLARS

I have immunized myself against disillusionment by adopting very low expectations. So I am rarely disappointed.

kingdom has a divine origin, the Lord has left it in feeble human hands, which sometimes do and sometimes do not reach out adequately for divine guidance in given cases. I do not complain about these human hands, for mine have been among them, and I know how difficult it is to disentangle my will from the divine will. In such a system, yes, of course, our leaders often make mistakes and commit sins, sometimes serious ones, with many unintended consequences. I try to follow the leaders anyway, not out of blind obedience or belief in their infallibility, but out of appreciation for the gravity of their responsibilities and the organizational complexities and cross-pressures within which they work. As a young man, I passed through that long process of disillusionment common to those who begin with a rosy view of Church history and hold unattainably high expectations for Church leaders. In later years, I have immunized myself against disillusionment by adopting very low expectations. So I am rarely disappointed.

In some instances, where I think leaders have been mistaken, or where their counsel did not seem relevant to my particular needs and circumstances, I have sought my own divine guidance directly and have received it. On such grounds, I have sometimes declined to participate personally in a policy or program that did not seem right to me. Yet, no matter how certain I have felt about my own position, I have never considered my personal guidance as license to lead or support a public challenge to the legitimacy of the Church leadership or to the policies and doctrines they have collectively and officially promulgated. I have felt free to write and speak publicly with my analyses of the origins and likely consequences of certain doctrines and policies, both historical and contemporary; but I have tried to do so with impersonal detachment and balance, without animus, and without attributing ulterior motives, even when I feel angry. While this posture has not resulted in any formal Church discipline, it has resulted in interviews with three different stake presidents and one prominent General Authority. I do not know on whose initiative ultimately these interviews were called for, but in all cases, I found them enjoyable and reassuring, conducted with mutual respect and good will. I have never been obsequious, I have never been threatened, and I have remained active in the Church. I am not surprised, however, that I have never been called as a bishop or stake president, either, which matters not a whit to me, for it only leaves me freer to speak and write as I please.



CHRIS CHECKETTS, originally published Sunstone, August, 1988

*“What makes you think your bishop should understand you?  
You’re a liberal Mormon, Ethan, for gosh sakes!”*

I know others have had very different outcomes in their interviews with leaders. I make no attempt to account for those differences—though I might have my suspicions. In my own interviews, I have always been prepared for further discipline, even for the extremity of excommunication. I have tried to take to each interview an open mind about my own possible failings and misunderstandings. I have tried also to cultivate a close enough personal relationship with the divine that if I were to be excommunicated or unfairly treated for my commitments of conscience, I could depart in the assurance that an injustice by Church leaders would simply not be ratified in the heavens and would eventually be overturned. To the extent that I have that divine assurance, I do not fear any Church discipline, and I cannot be intimidated. Yet, at the same time, I would do all I could to convey this same assurance to my own family, as well as to other members of the Church, so that those close to me need not be demoralized by whatever happens to me. Lavina, to her enormous credit, seems to have adopted this policy in large part toward her own family, which I’m sure is the main reason that her son completed an honorable mission and is marrying in the temple.

THIRD, THE HUMAN ELEMENT SHOWS ITSELF NOT ONLY IN NORMAL ORGANIZATIONAL PROCESSES AND UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES WITHIN THE CHURCH BUT ALSO IN THE COMINGS AND GOINGS OF HUMAN INFLUENCES FROM OUTSIDE. I speak here of more than the obvious local syncretic borrowings that all world religions have had to deal with. We in North America tend to forget that our local culture also gets imported into our religion in important respects. Many a feature of Church programs and history reflect the influences of outside trends and movements. These include the Word of Wisdom,

the Relief Society, the Boy Scouts, professionalized social welfare, racism, conservative politics, corporate models of governance, Victorian domestic traditions, feminism, and many other things. We might be glad about some of these outside imports but not so glad about others.

The point is, they all bespeak a strong susceptibility for Church programs, teachings, leaders, and members to be influenced by trends in American society. Feminism presents an interesting paradox here: It was tolerated if not supported by nineteenth-century Church leaders, perhaps in the belief that it would neutralize some of the outrage about polygamy among progressive American women. In the twentieth century, however, Church leaders have opposed feminism in the apparent belief that it undermines an American family already in trouble. To offer another example of changing Church response to social trends, I have just finished writing a book which argues that racist ideas of all kinds, imported into Mormonism from its American surroundings, have recently been contested and largely neutralized as an unintended consequence of a proselyting commitment among all the world's peoples.<sup>2</sup> Feminism and Victorian domesticity, racism and then racial egalitarianism, all have made themselves felt in Mormonism. In retrospect, we seem pretty sure that some of these influences have had divine sanction, but our ancestors felt the same way about the other influences. All these influences come from the surrounding social world, and we privilege them selectively depending upon our own generation, backgrounds, and interests. Our Church leaders do the same.

I HAVE NOT attempted to take up, one by one, Lavina's charges about various kinds of "ecclesiastical abuse" (another trendy term borrowed from the outside). I will say only that lumping all these accounts together under the same label obscures many differences among individual cases. Even the celebrated cases of the "September Six" (which her presentation augments to nine or ten) were not all the same, though (from what I know) I do not think excommunication was appropriate for any of them. Nor is orthodoxy vs. academic freedom the sole issue every time an outspoken scholar is denied tenure at BYU. Indeed, anyone who has had a career in secular academia, as I have, has had to deal regularly with the orthodoxy of political correctness in our public universities. As Church members, even "intellectual" Church members, we risk doing serious injustice ourselves each time we assume we know all the facts of a case well enough to make charges or point fingers. Now and then Lavina acknowledges this limitation and calls for us to "seek humility." Yet she also resorts at times to the implicit or explicit attribution of ulterior motives, or to rhetorical put-downs (e.g. the "follow the Prophet drum-roll"), or to sweeping generalizations (e.g. about the handling of child sexual abuse in the Church).

Please do not misunderstand my message here. Anyone who has read my assessments of recent Church history will know that I do not welcome the "retrenchment motif" that has increasingly characterized Church governance since World

War II. It has produced a Church far less comfortable for me than the one of my youth. Yet, I take a cyclical view of such developments, and I see signs already of an attenuation in this retrenchment, recognizing that major social trends and movements take a long time to work themselves out. Meanwhile, the placing of blame and assignment of motives for such developments, whether in large bureaucracies, in nation-states, or in the business cycle, greatly oversimplify social reality without enhancing our understanding of it. At the individual level, we might very well see cases of malfeasance, misfeasance, or unrighteous dominion, but even then, justly assigning blame is a complicated business. Furthermore, just as a practical matter, Church leaders are rarely influenced by public criticism from the inside, however sensitive they might be to external pressures. If, with all of its failings, this is still the Lord's kingdom, and not just another worldly enterprise, I would rather see us focus on damage control than on whistleblowing. Let us, by all means, speak up candidly to our leaders, local and general, but let us do so in love and temperance, and away from the din and glare of public scandal-mongers, just as we would do in our own families. ☺

#### NOTES

1. *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).
2. Since the time this paper was delivered, the book has been published as *All Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).



#### A MARVIN BELL READER

Just last week I discovered your Dorothy  
and then I took up this book of yours  
I got cheap last year at the fairgrounds sale.  
Five or six poems and I sit shaken,  
that inner quake where raindrops fall  
from wet branches, an after shower  
tuned to late gusts or even whispers of wind.  
Yes, yes. I know all that,  
but do you have to remind me?  
How shapely you have made this sad chaos  
I'm always stuffing back into the Jack's box.  
We both know what happens on touching  
that latch and how babies  
love to scare themselves silly.

—CAROL HAMILTON